

Message Text

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PAGE 01 QUITO 00279 161808Z
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C O N F I D E N T I A L QUITO 279

E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PINT EC
SUBJ: THE GOE IS SUCCESSFUL IN ITS CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM

REF: (A) QUITO 0182; (B) QUITO 0230; (C) QUITO 0273

1. BEGIN SUMMARY: THE CONSTITUTIONAL REFERENDUM HELD JANUARY 15 IS A SUCCESS FROM THE GOE'S POINT OF VIEW. THE FIRST CONSTITUTION RECEIVED 43 PERCENT OF THE VOTE IN A MASSIVE TURNOUT, WHILE THE NULLIFICATION CAMPAIGN RESULTED IN AN UNTHREATENING 23 PERCENT VOIDED BALLOTS. THE 1945 REFORMED CONSTITUTION RECEIVED A SURPRISING 33 PERCENT OF THE VOTE, REFLECTING A STRONG CONSERVATIVE SENTIMENT AMONG THE VOTERS. THE RESULTS WERE DIVIDED REGIONALLY, WITH THE FIRST CONSTITUTION AND NULLIFICATION CAMPAIGN RECEIVING GREATER SUPPORT IN GUAYAQUIL AND ON THE COAST, AND THE REFORMED 1945 CONSTITUTION RECEIVING STRONG BACKING IN THE CONSERVATIVE SIERRA. THE RESULTS INDICATE THAT BUCARAM RETAINS STRONG BUT NOT OVERWHELMING POLITICAL SUPPORT IN THE COASTAL REGION AND THAT MANY VOTERS WERE NOT CONVINCED BY THE
CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 02 QUITO 00279 161808Z

ARGUMENTS OF THE POLITICAL PARTIES WHICH HAD ALMOST UNANIMOUSLY SUPPORTED THE WINNING NEW CONSTITUTION. THE RESULTS HAVE GIVEN STRONG IMPETUS TO THE RETORNO PROCESS AS SCHEDULED. END SUMMARY.

2. THE JANUARY 15 REFERENDUM TO CHOOSE BETWEEN THE ALTERNATIVE CONSTITUTIONS HAS RESULTED, FROM THE GOE POINT

OF VIEW, IN A SUCCESS. A MASSIVE TURNOUT SURPRISED THOSE WHO HAD EXPECTED SIGNIFICANT APATHY-INDUCED ABSTENTION. A NEAR COMPLETE VOTE COUNT INDICATES A 43 PERCENT VOTE FOR THE FIRST CONSTITUTION (NEW DOCUMENT), A 33 PERCENT VOTE FOR THE SECOND CONSTITUTION (REFORMED VERSION OF THE CURRENTLY IN FORCE 1945 CONSTITUTION), 23 PERCENT NULLIFIED BALLOTS AND UNDER TWO PERCENT BLANK VOTES.

3. ALTHOUGH THE 23 PERCENT NULLIFIED VOTE FIGURE IS SIGNIFICANT, IT IS NOT HIGH ENOUGH FOR THOSE WHO OPPOSED THE REFERENDUM THOUGH THE NULLIFIED BALLOT CAMPAIGN TO CALL INTO DOUBT THE LEGITIMACY AND POPULAR SUPPORT OF THE REFERENDUM. THE FACT THAT EACH CONSTITUTIONAL ALTERNATIVE RECEIVED MORE VOTES THAN WERE NULLIFIED GIVES THE REFERENDUM LEGITIMACY AND WILL MAKE FURTHER ATTEMPTS TO DERAIL THE PROCESS. FROM ANY QUARTER, MUCH LESS LIKELY TO SUCCEED. IT WILL REQUIRE EXTRAORDINARY CIRCUMSTANCES TO PREVENT THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS NEW SCHEDULED FOR JULY 16 FROM TAKING PLACE.

4. QUITO'S EL TIEMPO AND GUAYAQUIL'S EL EXPRESO, WHO WERE LEADING THE NULLIFICATION CAMPAIGN IN THE MEDIA, PLUS FENCESITTING EL UNIVERSO OF GUAYAQUIL SEEMED TO ACKNOWLEDGE AS MUCH IN THEIR REPORTAGE OF THE RESULTS AND IT APPEARED THAT THEY WERE THROWING IN THE SPONGE IN THEIR BATTLE TO IMPUGN THE LEGITIMACY OF THE RETORNO PROCESS. CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 03 QUITO 00279 161808Z

5. ADMIRAL POVEDA, SPEAKING AFTER THE INITIAL LATE NIGHT COUNT ON JANUARY 15, COMPLIMENTED THE "POLITICAL MATURITY" OF THE ECUADOREAN PEOPLE AND COMMENTED THAT THE MASSIVE TURNOUT CONSTITUTED PUBLIC SUPPORT FOR THE GOE RETORNO PLAN. HE REITERATED EARLIER REMARKS THAT THE RETORNO PROCESS IS IRREVERSIBLE. DURING THE SAME EVENING, MINISTER OF GOVERNMENT COL. BOLIVAR ECHOED POVEDA'S REMARKS AND ADDED THAT THE ECUADOREAN PEOPLE HAVE EXPRESSED THEIR WILL IN THE FACE OF INDIVIDUALS AND SMALL GROUPS THAT HAD URGED OPPOSITION TO THE REFERENDUM.

6. ALTHOUGH THE GOE CAN VIEW THE REFERENDUM AS A SUCCESS, THE RESULTS WERE SOMEWHAT CLOUDED BY MASSIVE ADMINISTRATIVE FOULD-UPS. FOLLOWING THE INCOMPLETE VOTING LISTS NOTED IN EARLIER REPORTING, THE POLLING ITSELF WAS IRREGULAR. ALTHOUGH THE VOTING PLACES WERE TO BE OPEN AT 7:00 A.M., ELECTION WORKERS ARRIVED LATE AT MOST SITES. THERE WAS INSUFFICIENT SPACE AT MOST VOTING PLACES AND VOTERS HAD TO FIGHT LARGE LINES. IN QUITO SOME VOTERS WERE OBLIGED TO STAND IN LINE FOR OVER THREE HOURS. VOTING REQUIRED DETERMINATION AND SACRIFICE, AND IN

SEVERAL PLACES THE POLLS CLOSED WHILE THERE WERE STILL LINES OF WAITING VOTERS. ALTHOUGH THE POOR ADMINISTRATION IS NOT LIKELY TO CALL INTO DOUBT THE OUTCOME OF THE REFERENDUM, IT DOES INDICATE THAT THE GOE HAS MUCH GROUND TO COVER BEFORE THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTIONS. ALSO, IN REFERENDUM RELATED INCIDENTS, SEVERAL WELL KNOWN POLITICAL LEADERS (SEE SEPTTEL) WERE ARRESTED FOR ELECTIONEERING ON REFERENDUM DAY.

7. THE REFERENDUM RESULTS PROVIDED SEVERAL SURPRISES. FIRST, MOST OBSERVERS HAVE NOTED THE PREVAILING POLITICAL APATHY IN ECUADOR. THIS, COMBINED WITH THE UNFAMILIAR REFERENDUM PROCESS AND THE LACK OF UNDERSTANDING OF THE DIFFERENCES BETWEEN THE TWO CONSTITUTIONS, LED MANY TO

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 04 QUITO 00279 161808Z

BELIEVE THAT THERE WOULD BE A HIGH RATE OF ABSTENTION. THOUGH THE GOE'S ADMINISTRATIVE PROBLEMS WITH THE VOTING LISTS MAKE IT IMPOSSIBLE TO ACCURATELY DETERMINE THE PERCENTAGE OF ABSTENTION, IT DOES NOT APPEAR TO HAVE BEEN SIGNIFICANT (PERHAPS LESS THAN 40/0). THE MASSIVE GOE PUBLICITY CAMPAIGN (COMBINED WITH LEGALLY OBLIGATORY VOTING) CREATED GREAT PUBLIC INTEREST AND AN OVERWHELMING TURNOUT. SECONDLY, THE STRONG SUPPORT FOR THE REFORMED 1945 CONSTITUTION CAME AS A SURPRISE TO MANY. ALL POLITICAL PARTIES EXCEPT THE CID OF EX-PRESIDENT OTTO AROSEMENA SUPPORTED THE FIRST CONSTITUTION, BUT THE REFORMED 1945 CONSTITUTION POLLED A CLOSE SECOND. SINCE THE SUPPORT OF THE CID CAN BE LARGELY DISCOUNTED, IT SEEMS CERTAIN THAT THE GENERAL VIEW THAT THE SECOND CONSTITUTION WAS MORE CONSERVATIVE HAD A GREAT IMPACT ON THE ELECTORATE. (LIKELY THE MOST IMPORTANT SINGLE FACTOR WAS THAT THE FIRST CONSTITUTION PROVIDED FOR ILLITERATE VOTING AND THE SECOND DID NOT). IN MOST SIERRA PROVINCES THE SECOND CONSTITUTION OUTPOLLED THE FIRST. THIS RESULT SUGGESTS THAT A GOOD CENTER-RIGHT PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WILL HAVE A SIZEABLE ELECTORAL POOL TO BUILD UPON.

8. THE DISTRIBUTION OF THE VOTES INDICATES THAT THE NULLIFICATION CAMPAIGN HAD ITS GREATEST SUCCESS IN THE COASTAL PROVINCE. BUT THE FIRST CONSTITUTION ALSO PROSPERED ON THE COAST, RECEIVING 48 PERCENT IN GUAYAS, ABOUT NINE PERCENT HIGHER THAN THE AVERAGE IN THE OTHER PROVINCES. THIS SOMEWHAT REFLECTS THE VOTING STRENGTH OF POPULIST ASSAD BUCARAM WHO STRONGLY CAMPAIGNED FOR THE FIRST CONSTITUTION. HOWEVER, SINCE THE BUCARAM EFFORT DID NOT SUCCEED IN GETTING A MAJORITY TURNOUT FOR THE FIRST CONSTITUTION, IT FURTHER DEMONSTRATES THAT

CONFIDENTIAL

CONFIDENTIAL

PAGE 05 QUITO 00279 161808Z

THOUGH STRONG IN HIS STRONGHOLD HE IS BY NO MEANS OVER-
WHELMING EVEN THERE.

9. COMMENT: THE GOE CAN REASONABLY REGARD THE REFERENDUM
AS A SUCCESS. THE NULLIFICATION VOTE, THOUGH SIGNIFICANT,
CANNOT BRING THE LEGITIMACY OF THE REFERENDUM INTO QUESTION.
THE STRONG TURNOUT INDICATES A GREATER INTEREST IN THE
RETORNO PROCESS THAN WAS GENERALLY BELIEVED. GIVEN THE
INCREDIBLY POOR MANAGEMENT OF THE REFERENDUM, VOTERS
WERE FACED WITH CONSIDERABLE DIFFICULTY IN VOTING. A
GOOD TURNOUT UNDER THESE CIRCUMSTANCES ADDS FURTHER EVIDENCE
TO THE BELIEF THAT THE PUBLIC STRONGLY SUPPORTS THE
RETORNO PROCESS, AND AFTER HAVING GONE THROUGH THIS
UNPLEASANT VOTING EXPERIENCE, THE GENERAL ELECTORATE WILL
LIKELY HAVE LITTLE PATIENCE WITH ANY INDIVIDUAL OR GROUP
WHO TRIES TO DISRUPT THE PROCESS. ALSO, THE GOE CAN TAKE
HEART THAT THE MODERATE SUCCESS OF THE BUCARAM FORCES
INDICATES THAT THERE ARE REAL POSSIBILITIES THAT HE CAN
BE BEATEN FAIRLY ON JULY 16. ONE CAUTIONARY NOTE, HOWEVER:
THE STRONG TURNOUT FOR THE REFORMED 1945 CONSTITUTION,
WHICH WAS SUPPORTED BY ONLY ONE SMALL AND INSIGNIFICANT
POLITICAL PARTY, INDICATES THAT A LARGE SHARE OF THE
ELECTORATE HAS NOT BINDING TIES TO ANY POLITICAL ORGANI-
ZATION. THIS MUST RAISE QUESTIONS ABOUT THE SUCCESS
OF ANTI-BUCARAM POLITICAL PARTY COALITIONS.
BLOOMFIELD

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